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ABSTRACT

This digest summarizes a longer document with the same title concerning the introduction of enduring innovations into a higher education organization. Organizational change involves three steps: (1) mobilization, (2) implementation, and (3) institutionalization. Without institutionalization, the innovation is likely to be terminated no matter how well it is communicated and implemented. Factors influencing longevity of innovations include the intensity of direction and support from organizational leaders, the need for proper communication and decision making to discover the innovation's essential features for clearer identification and analysis, and the need for the innovation to be challenged in order to test its necessity and appropriateness for organizational improvement. Learning organizations can become innovative communities (where such innovation results in productive behavior) if organizational members are properly informed, thus allowing them to control what happens to them as members of the community. An organization's leaders and members must be flexible in developing innovations and setting levels at which these changes will achieve institutionalization. (GLR)

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Barbara K. Curry

It is not unusual for members of an organization to find themselves puzzling over the designs of their innovations and the best approach to gathering support and commitment from among their colleagues for putting those innovations in place. Knowing what it takes to put an innovation in place and what it takes to garner the support that will ensure the innovation's permanence is, in most instances, a benefit of hindsight. Hindsight is a broader view than the somewhat narrow and immediate views of an organization's members in the midst of creation or innovation. Each party comes to the process of creation or innovation with a vision of his or her own and influences change accordingly. As a result, a process that often sounds simple is much more complex and requires high levels of skill and collaboration to be successful.

What Is Permanence in Organizational Change?

Organizational change is a process that has been described extensively over the years, often as a model outlining the stages of change. One less complex typology includes three stages: (1) mobilization, whereby the system is prepared for change; (2) implementation, whereby changed is introduced into the system; and (3) institutionalization, whereby the system is stabilized in its changed state (Curry 1991). Studies of the way change occurs in organizations focus on each stage and attempt to find causes for outcomes that are often much less than the members of those communities had hoped for. In the studies, it is often difficult to determine where one phase stops and another begins, because mobilization, implementation, and institutionalization are interwoven throughout the life of an innovation.

If an innovation is not institutionalized, it is likely to be terminated. Those who attempt to distinguish one process from another should observe whether the innovation is sustained over time (Miles and Louis 1986). Accordingly, "models predict[ing] whether an innovation will be mastered and whether it will change the organization are very similar to those predicting the likelihood that it will be continued" (p. 36), which might occur because a basic, underlying set of processes exists common to both the mastery and the continuation of an innovation, or because good innovation is a necessary precursor to institutionalization.

Still another interpretation is possible: A successful innovation is one that has achieved its goals—whatever those goals might be. As a project achieves success, it can serve as a catalyst for subsequent innovations, and members of an organization are able to create and put in place other kinds of innovations that further change their community. Often those changes are dramatic as a result of an accumulation of influences. Although the original project is no longer distinguishable, it continues to influence innovation in particular and life within the organization in general. That continued influence can be construed as a measure of the extent to which change has been institutionalized.

Although organizational change is discussed as a terminal event or as having a clearly distinguishable beginning and end, complex interrelated events represent continuity in the process. The culmination of change, in addition to characterization as institutionalization or termination, might also be characterized as points of emergence or points where new or different states in the life cycles of organizations emerge (Cameron and Whetten 1984). In most instances, however, the focus of an organization's members is on the endurance of the innovations they create rather than on the emergence of new or subsequent programs.

What Factors Influence the Development and Longevity of Innovations?

A number of factors integral to the process of change support institutionalization or the extent to which an innovation becomes enduring. Innovations cannot become lasting without a rather significant role from leaders. The direction and support of leaders are required for change to take place. And the term "leader" is not limited to the chief executive officer. The role and the function of leadership are different. The *role* is a formal designation vested in contractual arrangements; the *function* is an informal designation in which responsibilities or activities associated with leadership are shared among members of the organization. Consequently, "leader" might refer to a number of individuals participating in the change process.

Other factors influence change, including communication and decision making. These factors are interrelated, dynamic, and central to the prosocial nature of organizations in general and to the construction of change that finds support among the majority of the members of organizational communities in particular. Decision making and communication can facilitate discovery of an innovation's essential features. Change is a negotiated process, requiring that standards of reasonableness be met. To help meet those standards, the dissident voice must be heard; that is to say, it must be part of communication networks and decision-making processes associated with the development and implementation of innovation. The dissident voice offers a test

of the premises upon which innovations are based, challenging standards implicit in beliefs about the kind of change necessary to improve an organization.

The dissident voice, also the target of political activity during change, helps to create a balance between vision and the realities inside and outside the organization. The dissident voice is paradoxically the jewel of change, an important factor in the iterative and transactional processes that are the distinguishing features of the innovative organization. In an innovative organization, this voice is not stilled; rather, it is heard, serving to improve the innovative design. And this treatment of the dissident voice is characteristic of learning organizations.

How Can Learning Organizations Become Innovative Communities?

Much of the current thinking about organizational change and innovative organizations includes the concept of innovative organizations as learning organizations (Argyris 1982; Beckhard and Pritchard 1992; Senge 1990). Accordingly, learning that takes place in organizations, if it is to be the kind that results in productive behavior, is based on providing members of the organization with valid information they can base their actions on and control what happens to them as members of the community. It allows members of the organization to govern their actions through "free and informed choice," and to support "internal commitment to choice" and "bilateral protection of others" (Argyris 1982, p. 103). As a result, members of the organization experience each other as "minimally defensive" in interpersonal relationships and group dynamics, "learning-oriented norms" emerge, and "high freedom of choice, internal commitment, and risk taking" are evident (p. 102). As a result, to the extent that its leaders and members can commit themselves to its evolution, an organization is in a position to become flexible in developing innovations and setting levels at which it will achieve institutionalization. In a learning organization, discovery and construction or creativity take place simultaneously.

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